Clips TIGER, Authoritarianism, Camp David

The NEW Spirit of Camp David, of Berchtesgaden Im Catoctins HW 12/8/72

Recently I have referrred to the nearby mountaintop with the name of Hitler's. In doing this, I was not intending a mere crack, for the evidence has been accumulating that it is not either unkind of irrelevant. That was Hitler's hideout, when he wanted to isolate himself from government, which he ran as a personal possession. Nixon's isolation from the government, its officers and agencies, is anti-democratic, whatever he choses to give as his reason for it. It means one-man control, and that is not the Constitutional concept.

Recently also I have made repeated references to the inability of the press to perform either its minimal duties or its traditional functions when he has been at Camp David. In the more than a month since the election, I doubt is Nixon has been in the White House teo days, and I seem to recall that much of that time was devoted to social functions, not the administration of government or its affairs.

Nixon is going farthur than merely making it difficult for the press to cover him at Camp David. While engaging in a false propaganda effort the purpose of which was to lie and say he had improved conditions for the press, he had made them so personally disageeable that reporters were staying away and depending upon handouts. I made comment on the announcement of the press trailer were it was made. That turns out to be an understatement from several current sources, today's Post and Life dated 12/8/72. Life has a two-page spread (10-1), mostly a single picture of rainsoaked reporters gatherer outdoors around two picnic tables, buried under thin plastic that does not cover them and rests on them, trying to use outdoor phones. One reporter is under his umbrella. (My own electrician had a dim view of these things and told me that the previous owner of our place was crazy to have an extension on his phone so he could take calls in the pool, even though the voltage is low.) Even under battlefield conditions, facilities would be better. There would at least be a tent. This is a miliary camp, and the scant protection of a tent on a mountaintop would present neither problems, nor significant cost. The absence of what would be available under the worst conditions can t be accidental or unintended. I think this is a deliberate effort to discourage press presence at Camp David except at Nixon's behest. (He then has a large, comfortable auditorium for them.) The sadistic politics to me clearly apparent is limned by a smaller LIFE picture, of Ron Ziegler peeking under the thin plastic with a broad laugh on his face. Life says he is "inspecting" and that he did not invite the soaked repoters inside. It also notes that this is all outside the camp itself, as I'd indicated earlier in notes indicating that even the comings and goings were secret from the press.

Much comment is possible and I think appropriate to the quotes in Lou Cannon's Post story, It deals with the excessive security and simultaneously quotes Nixon as saying he is more "relaxed" there, and "easier for me to get on top of the job". Only as a dictator, I suggest. It also suggests things about him and his attitudes, his state of mind. Behind all this excessive, including electronic security, vicious dogs, marines, barbed wire, double high fences-the military works.

It is interesting to compare this with the Kennedy interregnum, where nothing was secret, all business transacted from his Georgetown home, all visitors visible, all announcemen made for its doorstep, and TV cameras on duty around the clock-and during a lasting blizzard, unusually much snow for Washington.

Ziegler even refused reporters a tour of the camp. What is known seems to come from visitors. My knowledge included. Including from contractors who did work there. Cannon:"The principle charm of the place for Mr. Nixon, Ziegler has told reporters, is its privacy and the President intends to keepit that way."

An aide is quoted as saying Camp David food is better than that at the White House. The WH food is provided from funds controlled by the President, that at the Camp by the Navy, not with fancy chefs but with regular Navy mess crews. When the White House carryall stopped of at our farm, under Eisenhower, to pick up some of out produce, the mess crew was Phillipino mess boys and cooks. I met them. They all came in to look at the chickens. There was even a naval office in charge of them stationed at the White House , a Lt. Gillespie. Or, the era or Nixonburgers and NixonBurger.

I am getting an extra Post and will include that story. I would like the return of the Life picture. You should see it. Forty years ago accomodations were better in the hinterlnds. I had this kind of situation once only, and I remember it vividly. I was covering a football game with Washington College, near Chestertown, Md., froma plain table on the 50 yard line and in the rain. And that was in the remote for that day countryside.